

VZCZCXRO2036  
OO RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHFR #0749/01 1091625  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 181625Z APR 08  
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2672  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT IMMEDIATE 0185  
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA IMMEDIATE 0043  
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK IMMEDIATE 0361  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE IMMEDIATE 0043  
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT IMMEDIATE 0259  
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE IMMEDIATE  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE 2278

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 000749

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/16/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ZK](#) [UZ](#) [TI](#) [KZ](#) [KG](#) [TX](#) [FR](#)  
SUBJECT: CENTRAL ASIA: A/DAS SPRATLEN'S CONSULTATIONS WITH  
THE GOF

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER-COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT FOR REASON 1.4 (b) AND (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In April 4 meetings with French officials responsible for Central Asia, SCA A/DAS Pamela Spratlen was briefed on GOF plans for future engagement in the region, including FM Kouchner's April 10-11 visits to Ashgabat and Dushanbe as well as France's priorities for the region during its July-December 2008 EU Presidency. In this discussion of U.S. and European interests in the region, Spratlen and her interlocutors agreed on the importance of U.S./EU coordinated action. Both the MFA and the PM's office underlined the French intention to use the EU's Central Asia Strategy framework adopted during the German EU Presidency (January-July 2007) as the basis for its own EU Presidency initiatives in the region as well as for its bilateral engagement with countries in the region.

¶2. (C) GOF officials explained France's regional priorities as broadly concentrated in three key areas: security, energy, and trafficking. France intends to work on several specific projects in these areas, including border security, human rights, environmental security, water management, trafficking in persons, and narco-trafficking. Spratlen obtained French assurances on three key issues: (1) maintaining pressure on Kazakhstan to meet its Madrid commitments; (2) staying engaged, at a high level, with Dushanbe on the OSCE's mandate; and (3) continuing close U.S.- France and U.S.- EU cooperation on our assessment of Uzbekistan's progress on human rights. With all interlocutors, Spratlen laid out U.S. policy as helping the five Central Asian states strengthen their sovereignty and independence by opening up their societies and developing trade and strategic partners in the wider region, especially Afghanistan and points south. END SUMMARY

INTERLOCUTORS

¶3. (SBU) SCA A/DAS Pamela Spratlen met with the following French officials on April 4 in Paris: Isabelle Dumont, FM Kouchner's Counselor for Russia, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Balkans; Jacques Faure, MFA A/S-equivalent for Russia, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Balkans; Alexandre Vulic, MFA DAS-equivalent for Russia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus; Helene Roos, MFA Desk officer for Central Asia; and Emmanuel Mignot, the PM's Diplomatic Counselor for Strategic Affairs (NATO, non-proliferation), Russia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. Spratlen also met with Thomas Gomart, Director of the Russia/CIS program at the French Institute for International Relations (IFRI), a well known

French think-tank.

#### FRANCE'S COMEBACK IN CENTRAL ASIA

-----

¶4. (C) GOF officials told Spratlen that France largely disappeared from Central Asia in the late 90s, but has made a strategic decision to reinforce its presence in the region as part of the EU's newly adopted regional strategy. Several symbolic and substantive initiatives are part of France's return: PM Fillon's visit to Kazakhstan in February 2008; President Nazerbayev's upcoming visit to France in June 2008; President Bakiyev's visit to France in late 2008; FM Kouchner's visit to all five Central Asian capitals in April and May 2008 (the first such visits in fifteen years); the planned signing of a France/Kazakhstan Strategic Framework agreement; and Paris, hosting of an EU/Central Asia Ministerial Security Forum in October 2008.

#### GOF'S REGIONAL AGENDA

-----

¶5. (C) France's renewed interest in the region and its development initiatives all correspond to the EU's Central Asia Strategy (adopted during the German January-July 2007 EU Presidency), French officials told Spratlen. Central Asia needs Europe, Mignot said, noting that some countries in the region are looking for alternatives to Moscow. Europe needs Central Asia, Mignot added, not only because of its markets and resources but also because of its strategic location and importance to success in Afghanistan. French officials told Spratlen that France intends to focus on three key areas during its EU Presidency: energy, security, and trafficking.

PARIS 00000749 002 OF 003

As part of these broader themes, the GOF intends to introduce dialogue (and projects where appropriate) which touch on border security, energy security, narco-trafficking, trafficking in persons, the threat of Islamic extremism in Central Asia, a regional approach to water management, human rights, rule of law, and democracy. Mignot added that the GOF will encourage other high level European officials to visit the region in order for them to better appreciate its opportunities and challenges. Spratlen praised France and the EU's positive engagement in Central Asia, and provided an extensive briefing on the U.S.' work in the region which focuses on strengthening sovereignty and independence by encouraging open societies and developing trade and strategic partners in the wider region, especially Afghanistan and points south. U.S. policy, Spratlen emphasized, is largely tied to human rights, political progress, economic expansion and diversification, and institution and capacity building.

#### UZBEKISTAN

-----

¶6. (C) Discussion on Uzbekistan focused largely on EU sanctions which are scheduled to be reconsidered April 28, ¶2008. Mignot noted that France had observed some limited progress in Uzbekistan on human rights since President Sarkozy sent President Karimov a letter on the subject in January 2008. French officials explained that they support the continued suspension of EU sanctions in order to allow time for Uzbekistan to build on its limited progress. In particular, France is concerned about the implementation of a recent accord to begin cooperation on judicial reform, policing and law enforcement. EU sanctions officially expire in October 2008 unless all 27 member states vote to reinstate them. The GOF argued that a discussion in October will be more fruitful if Uzbekistan has the additional six months to demonstrate its intentions. French officials noted that there are several states already against reinstating sanctions in October 2008. If some EU members decide to support a renewal of sanctions in October, their arguments will be stronger if they can show that Tashkent did not take sufficient advantage of the EU's year-long suspension in

order to make progress.

¶7. (C) Vulic told Spratlen that with the exception of Sweden, the Netherlands, and Ireland, all other 24 member states currently supported this strategy. France plans to engage with Sweden, the Netherlands, and Ireland, none of whom are represented in Tashkent. All French officials expressed a great deal of interest in U.S. Congressional sanctions on Uzbekistan, which Spratlen explained in detail. Spratlen also urged France to consider how it can use the upcoming EU discussions to pressure Tashkent to allow ICRC further critical access to prisoners. Tashkent's progress on human rights has been extremely limited, Spratlen argued, and the international community must stay attentive to possible negative developments.

¶8. (C) Faure and Vulic both inquired about the U.S.' analysis of the Islamic radical threat to Uzbekistan and the countries in the region, particularly from Hizb ut-Tahir. France is concerned that the group's activities signal a heightened threat of terrorism. Spratlen noted that Washington is aware of EU interest in the subject, including EU envoy Pierre Morel's concerns. The State Department intends to host a conference on Islam in Central Asia next spring and Spratlen agreed to share conclusions with the French, if possible. Spratlen added that Islam is a very complex issue in the region and that Hizb ut-Tahir is only one of many organizations that warrant attention.

#### KAZAKHSTAN

-----

¶9. (C) PM Fillon's visit to Astana in February 2008 marked renewed French interest in a country that French officials described to Spratlen as a "model and leader for the region."

President Nazerbayev intends to visit France in June 2008, while Sarkozy has agreed to return the state visit in the first half of 2009. Mignot told Spratlen that France will soon sign a Strategic Framework Agreement with Astana -- a move that should form the basis for broader economic and security cooperation. Several French officials emphasized France's excellent relations with Kazakhstan, and noted that France has offered to train Kazakh diplomats and journalists

PARIS 00000749 003 OF 003

in the run up to Astana's assumption of the 2010 Chairman-in-Office (CiO) position at the OSCE in Vienna. Spratlen stressed that although Kazakhstan has made some progress on human rights and democracy -- and more economic gains than other Central Asian states -- it is critical to keep pressure on Nazerbayev to live up to the commitments he made at the Madrid OSCE Summit. Dumont and Vulic assured Spratlen that France will maintain pressure on Kazakhstan to live up to those commitments and will continue offering assistance to help Astana succeed. Mignot added that France also intends to double the number of Kazakh students given the opportunity to study in French universities. Vulic noted that France has proposed its own candidate to head the OSCE mission in Kazakhstan, and would appreciate U.S. support.

#### TURKMENISTAN

-----

¶10. (C) French MFA officials told Spratlen that the EU is assessing its potential for assistance to Turkmenistan. France, Vulic said, is the only Western country to host a cultural center in Turkmenistan, but quickly added that this was of limited advantage. FM Kouchner planned to present France's interest in providing assistance on rule of law, water management, and governance to Turkmenistan during his April 10 visit to Ashgabat. France is also considering the possibility of Trans-Caspian projects, but is cautious due to the opaque nature of energy deals between Moscow and Ashgabat. Overall, French officials assessed no substantive changes in Turkmenistan, but noted that Ashgabat's desire to have contact with the outside world was in and of itself a

fundamental change in the regime's position thereby providing the EU with an opportunity for positive engagement. Spratlen said that the U.S. sees the current opening -- since Turkmenbashi's death -- as an opportunity to work with Ashgabat in making democratic and economic advances. Fifteen months in, Spratlen said, it is clear that this is a long-term project requiring a great deal of patience.

TAJIKISTAN

-----

¶11. (C) Spratlen told French officials that the OSCE's work in Tajikistan is essential to the country's sustainability. The international community, she argued, must redouble its efforts. Dumont assured Spratlen that FM Kouchner intended to raise the OSCE's mandate in Tajikistan during his visit to Dushanbe on April 11. Dumont added that France offered assistance to Tajikistan during the harsh winter but Tajik authorities refused to identify specific aid requirements and eventually refused France's offers. French authorities noted that France's main focus in Tajikistan is security, including France's airbase in Dushanbe which it uses to supply its troops in Afghanistan.

¶12. (U) This cable has been cleared by A/DAS Spratlen.

Please visit Paris' Classified Website at:  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

PEKALA